

Rating Trails – How difficult is it?

From time to time members ask me about how a trail should be rated. Rating mean different things depending on if you're hiking or riding a mountain bike. On horse back it means something else. Also, the perception of how difficult a trail should be rated is influenced by the experience of the one rating it. Time of year or weather conditions - a trails difficulty can change drastically. A level 3 or 4 trail can easily turn into something altogether more technically with the addition of snow, rain, wind, high water... etc.

Below are some examples of trail ratings.

CMCNY Hiking Rating System

Each hiking activity is rated through grade A-F, the following is the explanation of the Ratings:

Level A - Very easy. Mostly flat terrain. 3-5 miles.

Level B - Easy hike. Some hills, 4-7 miles.

Level C - Moderate for most of people. Some steep hills, 5-8 miles

Level D - Challenging, steeper terrain, 8-10 miles

Level E - Strenuous, 9-15 miles

Level F - Difficult, 15 miles +

International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA), which provides accurate classification of trails.

According to the:

Tread width

Tread surface

Maximum and average trail grade

Natural obstacles and technical trail features.

According to these parameters, trails are separated into five levels of difficulty:

Easiest (white circle)

Easy (green circle)

More difficult (blue square)

Very difficult (black diamond)

Extremely difficult (double black diamond)

MBA TRAIL DIFFICULTY RATING SYSTEM

	White Circle	Green Circle	Blue Square	Black Diamond	Double Diamond
Width	1800mm	900mm	600mm	300mm	150mm
Surface	hard	firm & stable	mostly stable	widely variable	unpredictable
Avg Grade	>5%	>5%	>10%	>15%	>20%
Max Grade	>10%	>15%	>15%	>20%	>25%
Obstacles	none	avoidable	small	Medium loose	unstable

Squaw Butte Trail Rating System (2011)

1 = arena (flat, groomed, contained)

2 = dirt roads (surface conditions & traffic could be factors)

3 = single track with small stream crossing, rolling hills

4 = rocky areas, narrow spots, bridges, small boggy areas

5 = step ups & downs, river crossing, steep hill siding, rocky (some Kodak moments)

6 = extreme trail, with route finding and hazards that could result in injury to rider or stock.

Note: A “Kodak moment” is when a rider would rather look at the wild flowers up slope than keep their eyes on the trail where they are going, not because the flowers are so pretty but because doing the other makes them very uncomfortable. A good time to be riding a horse that is experience and the rider trusts.

Examples:

- (1) Circle G River Ranch, Old Lamb Ranch, Emmett Arena by the defunk car dealer.
- (2) Sections of the Emmett Horse Park, Diamond Basin, Celebration Park
- (3) Wilson Creek (Owyhee), Celebration Park, Emmett Horse Park, Trail between Peace Creek and Devils Slide trails
- (4) Peace Creek, Poison Creek, West Mountain South, many Owyhee trails
- (4/5) Many of the trails Squaw Butte work and ride, Wilson Corral, Squaw Creek, Wet Foot.
- (5) Wilson Corral & Gabe Peak Loop, Crooked River, Renwyck Creek, Devil's Slide
- (6) Sections of trail between Ardeth and Edna Lake (Sawtooth's), high water crossings

A lot of the trails we do are rated 2, 3 and 4 which are generally safe for most riders and horses. If it is a 5/6 we warn everyone and often suggest a rider / horse sit this one out.

I have found that most of the wrecks don't happen on the 4 & 5 trails, the horse is working too hard and is focused, but on the 1, 2 and 3 where they get distracted. We have had the most problems in parking lots getting ready to start the ride, or walking through a level meadow and in boggy areas.

Working with your horse throughout the year exposing them to different trails helps make them safer as is riding with other experienced horses and riders.

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